



GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes

Special Called Meeting – Redistricting

November 4, 2021

6:04 p.m.

County Square - Council Chambers

Council Members

Mr. Willis Meadows, *Chairman, District 19*

Mr. Dan Tripp, *Vice-Chairman, District 28*

Mrs. Xanthene Norris, *Chairman Pro Tem, District 23*

Mr. Joe Dill, *District 17*

Mr. Mike Barnes, *District 18*

Mr. Stephen Shaw, *District 20*

Mr. Chris Harrison, *District 21*

Mr. Stan Tzouvelekas, *District 22*

Mrs. Liz Seman, *District 24*

Mr. Ennis Fant, Sr., *District 25*

Mr. Lynn Ballard, *District 26*

Mr. Butch Kirven, *District 27*

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting date, time, place and agenda was posted online and on the bulletin board at County Square and made available to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned citizens.

Council Members Absent

None

Staff Present

Joe Kernell, *County Administrator*

Mark Tollison, *County Attorney*

Chris Antley, *Assistant County Attorney*

Regina McCaskill, *Clerk to Council*

Pam Gilliam, *Administrative Assistant*

Conway Belangia, *Director, Election Commission*

Others Present

Frank Rainwater, *Executive Director, SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office*

Call to Order

Chairman Willis Meadows

Invocation

Councilor Ennis Fant

Pledge of Allegiance

Item (2)

Presentation of the 2020 Census Data and Receipt of Information Regarding the Redistricting and Plan Adoption Process

Presented by: Frank Rainwater, Executive Director
SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office

Mr. Rainwater stated he would cover three major categories:

- The latest trends and requirements regarding redistricting
- Specific statistics as applied to Greenville County
- Options and possible direction going forward

Greenville County was one of approximately 30 counties and cities that the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office was assisting in the redistricting process. Release of the 2020 Census Data was delayed until almost October 1; census data was normally released on or about April 1.

Mr. Rainwater stated there had been a major change at the national level. The Supreme Court ruled Section 5 and/or Section 4 of the Voter's Rights Act as unconstitutional. The Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office no longer had to submit redistricting plans to the Department of Justice. Prior to the ruling, approval had to be granted to approve the plan. On the other hand, there was some assurance that the Department of Justice had approved the plan; it made it a bit more difficult for someone to challenge. Mr. Rainwater stated once Council approved its redistricting plan, no approval as needed by any other entity. It was important for Council to understand the requirements of the plan in order to make informed decisions.

Mr. Rainwater stated the lines had to be drawn somewhere; it was not a simple process. It would take cooperation from Council and input from others to determine what the County wanted in terms of redistricting.

The goal of redistricting was to ensure that a voice in one district weighed the same as a voice in another district. The inmate population was excluded from the redistricting process as they were not allowed to vote; 818 individuals were excluded in Greenville County, due to incarceration. The ideal district size in Greenville County was 43,726 based on its population. Mr. Rainwater stated the population of District 17 was 41,473 which meant it was underpopulated by 2,253, a deviation from the goal of -5.1%. Some districts were close to the ideal district size while others had a significant deviation. Mr. Rainwater stated District 27 had grown quite a bit since 2010; there were 23% more people in that district compared to the ideal district size.

The courts have stated there was a maximum deviation of 10%. Deviation was the range from the district with the highest population at 22.96% (District 27) to the district with the lowest at 9.7% (District 25), resulting in a deviation of 32.7%. The courts required redistricting if the total deviation for the County was greater than 10% due to non-compliance. Mr. Rainwater stated the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office recommended a deviation in the 5% range; however, Council may determine that 5% was not sufficient. If Council adopted a 5% deviation, the highest district could be approximately 2.5% above normal and the lowest district could be approximately 2.5% below normal. The Congressional districts were drawn to 0% deviation; local governments had a bit more flexibility. Given that fact that most of the districts in Greenville County had populations that varied greatly around the ideal district size of 43,726, more than likely there would have to be adjustments made to a number of districts in the County.

Under the 14th Amendment, the courts have ruled that race could not be used as a denominate factor when trying to equalize the population. The Voting Rights Act emphasized that minorities must be given the opportunity to elect the candidate of their choice, under certain conditions. Council had to balance the 14th Amendment, "one person, one vote", vs. the Voting Rights Act. Mr. Rainwater stated this was the first time redistricting was being done without the approval of the Department of Justice.

New criteria under Section II of the Voting Rights Act stipulated minority density population had to be considered, as well as minority voting blocs, which could prevent minorities from electing their candidate of choice. That analysis had to be taken into account in the redistricting process.

The total minority population in Greenville County was 17.55%. It would be assumed that approximately 2 of the 12 Council Districts would be “minority district.” The black population of District 23 was 39.48%, which was almost equal to the white population; it was considered an “minority influence district.” District 25 was not a majority district; however, it was considered a minority influence district.

The white population in Greenville County was growing faster than the black population. If that trend continued, the challenge would be even tougher in 2030. The black population was not evenly spread out among the other districts. It was important to keep those areas in mind without making race a factor. The minority voting age population also had to be considered as opposed to just the minority population. The voting age population was about the same for District 23 and 25 and a bit lower than the overall population.

A set of principles called “Traditional Redistricting Criteria” were additional considerations that Council had to review as part of the redistricting process. Within a district, each part of the district had to be contiguous or “touch” another part of that same district. Districts must also be compact, which was more of an “eye test” as opposed to a “statistical test.” It was important to avoid splitting precincts. When ensuring “one person, one vote”, precincts were not always the same size; it may be necessary to split some precincts to achieve the “one person, one vote” standard.

Two other issues for Council to consider were 1) determining core districts and 2) communities of interest. It was perfectly acceptable to consider communities of interest when determining how lines were drawn.

Mr. Rainwater stated the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office could make an “initial stab” at redistricting for Greenville County. They would present a proposal for Council to consider and share with the public. He added that they may do well on the numbers but not as well in regards to communities of interest. Council may want to make the initial attempt. He needed Council to identify a contact person in order to streamline the process.

Councilor Ballard asked if the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office would take a “first pass” or if they were waiting for Council to ask for assistance.

Mr. Rainwater stated it was up to Council.

Councilor Fant stated Council had talked about what was of particular interest to them and to the County. He suggested each Council Member make a list of priorities for their districts.

Chairman Meadows suggested a workshop be scheduled in the near future to work on each Council Member’s priorities.

Vice-Chairman Tripp stated a workshop was a good idea; he inquired as to when the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office needed the information.

Mr. Rainwater stated if Council could schedule a workshop within the next week or so, it would take approximately 2-3 weeks afterwards for a turnaround on information. He stated it may be impossible to accommodate all requests; it would be helpful to prioritize them.

Councilor Dill stated he agreed Council needed to have a workshop and discuss the issue as soon as possible.

Councilor Seman inquired about the latest date to approve the maps.

Chairman Meadows stated it was his understanding that the process needed to be completed by February.

Mr. Rainwater stated the redistricting had to be completed before filing opened in mid-March. The redistricting required three readings and a public hearing. Some counties were giving first reading by title only with amendments at second and third reading. The proposed ordinance needed to address adherence to the 14th Amendment and to the Voting Rights Act, as well as set a deviation under 10%.

Item (3) Resolution Adopting Criteria for Developing Redistricting Plans

Chairman Meadows stated most of the items that Mr. Rainwater covered were included in the proposed resolution.

Action: Councilor Seman moved to adopt a resolution adopting redistricting criteria to be used in developing the 2020 Redistricting Plan.

Councilor Dill asked if a public hearing was required.

Mr. Tollison stated public input should be solicited every time the County took up the subject of redistricting. A public hearing would be associated with additional readings, once Council developed a suitable plan.

Motion as presented carried unanimously.

Item (4) Public Comments and Questions Regarding the Redistricting and Plan Adoption

- **Lawson Wetli** – appeared representing The League of Women Voters

Item (5) Adjournment

Action: Councilor Dill moved to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Regina G. McCaskill
Clerk to Council